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NOV 18 1956

Approved For Release 2000/06/05 : CIA-RDP70-00058R

NEW YORK POST

Circulation 399,886
 S. 265,066

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Date:

Pieces of My Mind

By Max Lerner

The swift pace of events puts a strain on every world leader. Including Eisenhower, Khrushchev, Tito, and Nehru. Tito has finally come out with a denunciation of the use of Soviet troops in Hungary. It will have some effect in putting the revolt in a frame that cuts across national boundaries.

Yet it comes tardily, after 20,000 Hungarians have been massacred and tens of thousands of others deported. Here is one case where a "leader" has failed to lead, and has only tagged on to the contortions of events. . . . By denouncing the "erroneous attitude" only of the "Stalinists" in Russia, Tito also makes it clear that he will oppose any revolutionary move that the satellites may make towards freedom beyond communism itself. For Tito we must assume that freedom is a splendid thing, but only within the confines of an "independent" Communist prison.

Tito thus remains a trusted comrade of Khrushchev, on his side in the intramural struggle with Moscow and purges of the generals.

One gets a somewhat similar feeling from Eisenhower's press conference on Hungary. They seemed to have been a great regret that the matter had died well. . . . The revolt. Presumably they should have checked it out with the Central Intelligence Agency, then as usual with their brothers Dulles.

I must confess that I find it difficult to admonish the dead in so austere a fashion. A revolt like the Hungarian is not a deliberate act; it is an explosion. It is difficult, after a decade of brutal tyranny, to behave with greater circumspection and better timing.

True, the revolt might have stopped at the level of a Gomułka government in Poland, without any sign of Titoist communism. But surely the responsibility for this beyond this phase lies as much with the previous failure of our great masters as it does with the Hungarians themselves.

The struggle for Hungarian freedom is not a case of the pose of nations' neutrality on our part.

Nehru's behavior on the Hungarian revolt is even more shocking than Eisenhower's. He is against the taking of free elections in Hungary on the ground that it would infuriate the Russians and cause more bloodshed. . . . He uses harsh words to the obligator as he prepares to visit Moscow. It only makes him madder.

In Nehru's case this bit of doubletalk may be motivated by his own problems in the Kashmir question. Here India faces a plebiscite which would probably go against it. . . . This is silly, of course, but it leaves open the question of principle on which Nehru prides himself. It will be interesting to see how he handles the problem on his coming visit to the United States.

There is one other aspect to the Hungarian crisis. . . . The American people are stuck with a foreign policy which is largely the result of his own

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There is nothing wrong about working within the UN and everything right about it. But it need not mean inaction on our score. Bulganin & Co. fall back on the UN when it suits them yet they are also pushing their own national policies with great effectiveness through national declarations. The Bulganin letter to Eden and Ben-Gurion were triumphs of propaganda that we have not dared to answer.

The picture one gets of President Eisenhower in this crisis is of an earnest and frightened man, baffled by events whose coming he did not foresee and for whose solution he has neither vigor of mind nor boldness of decision.

The President has treated this as a dangerous crisis of potential nuclear war with Russia, and has alerted every airfield and sent out fleets out of harbor. . . . But it was never such a war crisis; since the Russians do not dare start a nuclear war at this moment when they are overwhelmed with trouble in their own imperial house.

It is something quite different: a crisis of diplomatic decision. Given this crisis, the administration has blundered three times: once by pushing the rapid order for a cease-fire that saved Nasser's political skin and kept him from being overthrown; a second time by using weasel words for the Hungarian revolt at a moment when the free world looked to us for leadership; a third time by letting the Russians take the diplomatic offensive in the Middle East, and by failing to confront the fact of Nasser as a Russian pawn.

It would be idle to speculate on what Stevenson might have done in such a crisis had he been elected. For one thing, they would have had to be a bipartisan arrangement until Stevenson could take over the direction of foreign policy. For another, Stevenson could never act as if our only policy alternative were on the one hand involvement in a nuclear war and on the other the exercise of political realism.

There are earnest liberals who are urging Eisenhower to resign and Stevenson now as Secretary of State, in Dulles place the hot seat. But we have Presidential government, involving essential leadership in foreign affairs, and we have party government, involving party responsibility. The American people are stuck with Eisenhower, and Eisenhower is stuck with a foreign policy which is largely the result of his own